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Steer Feedout Program
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In recent years, the beef industry has made great strides in making it easier for producers to access the highest quality genetics in the U.S. through timed artificial insemination (AI) programs. Many of these AI sires have carcass traits that excel in today's marketplace. One dilemma for cow-calf producers, though, is how to cash in on these genetics and get dollars back in their pocket for the increased carcass value of the calves that are produced from these matings.

For many years, my colleague Eldon Cole at Mt. Vernon, MO, has coordinated a steer feedout program. The program is geared toward cow-calf producers that have not retained ownership of their calves through the feedlot. It provides producers a chance get information on how their calves perform in the feedlot and on the rail without risking their entire calf crop.

Calf prices are strong right now, but they will eventually come down. Participating in programs such as this allows producers to explore alternative markets in anticipation of changing future market conditions. By learning how calves perform in the feedlot and on the rail, breeding and management decisions can be made to change or enhance the quality of cattle produced on a ranching operation. It all starts with a first step, though, and this is one opportunity for cow-calf producers to consider.

Goals of the program include giving cattlemen the opportunity to: (1) Evaluate the genetics and management of their calves as they influence feedlot performance and carcass characteristics. (2) See if cattle hit the 70-70-0 target: 70% low choice or better, 70% yield grade 1 and 2, 0% outs. (3) Gain experience feeding cattle and retaining ownership without the investment and risk of feeding an entire pen of cattle. (4) Improve the quality and reputation of Missouri cattle while exploring market alternatives.

Participation in the steer feedout begins around weaning time. Calves must be weaned at least 30 days prior to delivery. They must be bunk broke, dehorned, castrated and healed. Calves should not be implanted at weaning. There is a strict vaccination protocol that must be carried out. Optimum entry weights are 500 to 750 pounds.

The entry deadline for this year's spring born steer feedout is October 10, 2013. Entry forms and additional information can be obtained by contacting me at the Benton County Extension Center at (660) 438-5012 or by e-mail at schmitze@missouri.edu. A unique hurdle for mid-Missouri producers is coordinating delivery of the calves. If you are interested in the program, please contact me as soon as possible so we can begin making arrangements to get transportation arrangements sorted out. University of Missouri Extension is an equal opportunity / ADA institution.

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